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PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

ABOUT THIS SERIES » The News-Press has honored outstanding community contributors for 28 years. The Person of the Year finalists were picked from more than 60 nominations, with the winner to be named Feb. 19 at a reception at FGCU's Cohen Ballroom in Fort Myers.

BUSINESS OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

MAKING THEIR MARK



ANDREW WEST/THE NEWS-PRESS

Scott Fischer opened Six Bends Harley-Davidson, a dealership and entertainment venue in Fort Myers.

Harley dealer Fischer aims for 'strategic philanthropy'

By Laura Ruane
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Scott Fischer is still revved up from opening his 16.5-acre, Six Bends Harley-Davidson dealership in late October.

"People are just completely blown away by it," Fischer said of the south Lee County campus that includes a 54,000-square-foot store, a motorcycle riding academy and Top Rocker Field, an event venue with capacity for 5,000 people.

Six Bends, by the way, refers to a six-bend handlebar, which is a part of some customized

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RICARDO ROLON/THE NEWS-PRESS

Joseph R. Catti is president and chief executive officer of Finemark National Bank & Trust.

Joe Catti, Finemark Bank 'strive to do what's right'

By Dick Hogan
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Joe Catti started his professional career raising money for the American Cancer Society in Miami before going into banking.

"I decided I'd rather be a volunteer than an employee," he said with a chuckle.

But now, as director, president and chief executive officer of Fort Myers-based Finemark National Bank & Trust, his business philosophy owes a lot to the nonprofit where he first cut his teeth in the world of money.

"The underlying philosophy is we always

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JACK HARDMAN/THE NEWS-PRESS

Fort Myers-based Norman Love Confections went global, entering a partnership with Princess Cruises.

Love's labors bring sweet rewards to SW Florida

By Laura Ruane
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Fort Myers-based Norman Love Confections went global last year, cruising on vintage TV's "Love Boat" line.

The partnership with Princess Cruises is one of several sweet accomplishments for Norman Love, company founder and president.

"He could be anywhere. He's such a jewel for this community," said Mark Loren, a friend, local fine jewelry designer and merchant — and an occasional collaborator in

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DEC. 28
People of the
Year Finalists

DEC. 29
Public Official of
the Year Finalists

DEC. 30
Hero of the
Year Finalists

DEC. 31
Business of the
Year Finalists

JAN. 2
Trailblazer of
the Year Finalists

JAN. 3
Rising Stars
Finalists

JAN. 4
People to Watch
for 2015 Finalists

Read about this year's finalists and register for awards ceremony at peopleoftheyear.news-press.com



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Fischer

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motorcycles.

Fischer, 55 and a former off-road motorcycle racer, is founder and CEO of Scott Fisher Enterprises, the owner-operator of six Harley dealerships and retail stores in Florida, North Carolina, Alabama and New Mexico. He employs about 120 people in Southwest Florida.

His business acumen and partnering with non-profit community organizations earned Fischer a finalist spot for The News-Press' Business Person of the Year. The winner will be announced Feb. 19.

Still to come at Six Bends: A mix of tenant businesses that very likely will include a micro-brewery, a boutique hotel and a tattoo parlor.

Count on more events, too, including a hot rod and vintage car "cruise in" and music festivals.

"Our whole focus is to bring the non-rider in," Fischer said.

Six Bends Harley-Davidson recently threw a Christmas celebration with live entertainment that was free to the public. On Jan. 15, it will host the Cattle Barons' Ball for the American Cancer Society.

Besides selling more Harleys, Fischer believes in community service: "When you prosper from a community you have a duty to find a way to serve that community.

His goal: "to work hard at providing strategic philanthropy."

Said Fischer: "I don't want to just fund a cause: I want to help them build business plans that will help them grow."

One example: Picking up the tab for developing a better website for the region's United Way, "so they could grow their capacity" to serve the community.

Fischer's outreach includes the Southwest Florida Community Foundation, Blessings in a Backpack, MDA, March of Dimes and Junior Achievement, which named him a laureate in 2012.

"You may know him as that Harley guy, but he's so much more," said Sarah Owen, Southwest Community Foundation president & CEO.

Fischer made the Six Bends dealership "a value proposition for the whole community," Owen said. "He gets that making a difference can be inspiring and fun."

The Community Foundation, Fischer said, "is aligning us with the right people to help."

Fischer, Owen said, "is all in on everything he does, with full gusto and all of his heart."

Owen added: "If I have an issue I want to solve, Scott Fischer is one of the first persons I'd call."

Although it's been grand hearing the compliments about his dream project that weathered the Great Recession, Fischer calls something other than Six Bends as his most-satisfying achievement of 2014.

It's having "a healthy company with great morale, great customer support and great employee engagement."

Catti

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strive to do what's right," Catti said. "There are times, obviously, when we make mistakes, but if we make a mistake, we'll fix it. And we sincerely care about our clients and those of us who work at the bank."

Catti and Finemark are finalists for The News-Press Business of the Year Award. The winner will be announced Feb. 19.

He started his banking career at 28 in his hometown of Miami with Northern Trust, which moved him to its Southwest Florida operation in 1992.

In 2007, with the Southwest Florida economy in a tailspin, Finemark opened its doors in Fort Myers with Catti as its first president and CEO.

Finemark quickly established itself as a quality operation and in 2010 received a rare five-star rating from Coral Gables-based Bauer Financial, which rates banks on their financial stability.

The bank has achieved that, Catti said, not by trying to gauge the economy's health but because "We spend a really significant amount of time getting to know the people we do business with. That results in deep, sincere relationships."

Catti has also main-

tained strong relationships with the charities he's helped through the years.

When one of those — the Quality Life Center in Dunbar — ran into financial problems early last year, Catti offered to raise money for the financially troubled non-profit.

Then he helped negotiate a deal that resolved the \$986,000 balloon payment from Fifth Third Bank that threatened Quality Life's existence.

Through a combination of contributions and debt forgiveness by Fifth Third, Quality Life was left debt-free.

"Joe played a significant role," said Abdul-Haq Muhammed, executive director of Quality Life Center. "He utilized

his expertise in helping us to negotiate an agreement with Fifth Third as well as assisting in raising money to help us to meet our financial obligations."

A myriad of programs for children ranging from boating to academic enrichment and the performing arts were saved as a result, Muhammed said.

"We found Joe to be a mild-mannered business intellect who was very savvy in our negotiation phase with Fifth Third," he said. "And at the same time he demonstrated to us a commitment to young people."

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Love

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business and in charity.

Love's creativity, combined with consummate perfectionism and a passion for his community, have earned Love acclaim in Southwest Florida and a finalist spot as The News-Press' Business Person of the Year. The winner will be announced Feb. 19.

Other Love achievements in 2014 include:

» Opening a fourth retail shop in the Fort Myers-Naples area;

» Being named to Southwest Florida Junior Achievement's Business Hall of Fame;

» Gaining national attention as one of 10 finalists in USA TODAY's inaugural Entrepreneur of the Year contest; and

» Publishing his book, "Artistry in Chocolate, A Story of Love," an 84-page coffee-table volume filled with photos of sweet treats and Love's success story.

Chocolate Journeys is a joint venture with the cruise line that features custom-crafted desserts prepared by Love-trained chefs, chocolate cocktails, dessert-making demonstrations, chocolate and wine tastings and Love chocolates sold in ship stores.

It launched on the Regal Princess in November, and will be available throughout the 18-ship fleet.

The candy company got its start in Southwest Florida, founded in October 2001 by Love and his wife, Mary. It creates and distributes ultra-premium, handcrafted chocolates from headquarters just a fly ball

away from the Boston Red Sox spring training facility at JetBlue Park on Daniels Parkway.

The chocolates, as well as fine pastries, desserts and gelato, are produced fresh daily for sale at three chocolate salons and a gelato shop. Chocolates are sold wholesale and through the company website, www.NormanLoveConfection.com, and can be shipped throughout the continental United States.

Over 13 years, Love — that's his real name — grew his artisanal candy and pastry business from two employees working in 600 square feet to nearly 70 employees; a 6,000-square-foot chocolate factory; a 5,000-square-foot pastry, bakery and gelato production center; a 10,000-square-foot warehouse/fulfillment area; and

four retail stores, plus more than 200 restaurant and hotel accounts.

"Our growth is dictated by our ability to produce more without compromising quality or customer service," Love said.

The Loves support more than 250 charity efforts yearly, including the American Cancer Society, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Make a Wish America.

"What I most love about Norman is the humility with which he strives for excellence every day," said Keegan Gerhard, a celebrity chef and former host of Food Network Challenge who's cooked in Southwest Florida with Love for a charity fund-raiser.

Said Gerhard: "He never forgets that we're in a service industry — it's all about the guest."